

HB 457 -- Conscience Rights of Medical Service Providers

Sponsor: Jones (110)

This bill specifies that any medical professional or health care institution that provides medical services, has the right not to participate in and cannot be required to participate in any phase of patient medical care, treatment, or procedure that violates his or her conscience including his or her religious, moral, or ethical principles that are adherent to a sincere and meaningful belief in God or in relation to a supreme being.

No medical professional or health care institution can be civilly, criminally, or administratively liable for declining to participate, provide or perform any specified medical procedure or research that violates his or her conscience.

No medical professional or health care institution can be discriminated or retaliated against for declining to participate, provide or perform any specified medical procedure or research that violates his or her conscience. Reassignment to a position that does not require participation in a specific medical procedure or research and that does not result in a demotion or reduction in pay or benefits is not a retaliatory action.

Reasonable notice must be provided by an employee asserting a right not to participate in a specific medical procedure or research.

It will be unlawful for any person, the state, a political subdivision, a public or private institution, or a public official to discriminate against any medical institution or any person, association, corporation, or other entity attempting to establish a new or operating an existing health care institution in any manner because it declines to participate, provide or perform any specified medical procedure or research which violates the institution's conscience.

It will be unlawful for any public official, agency, institution, or entity to deny any form of aid, assistance, grants, or benefits or in any other manner to coerce, disqualify, or discriminate against a person or entity attempting to establish a new or operating an existing health care institution because it declines to participate, provide or perform any specified medical procedure or research contrary to its conscience.

The provisions of the bill do not authorize a health care professional or institution to withhold lifesaving emergency medical treatment or services or alleviate a medical professional from the duty to inform a patient of his or her condition, risks,

prognosis, and available options and resources. A cause of action for damages or injunctive relief, or both, may be brought for a violation of these provisions. It cannot be a defense to any claim that the violation was necessary to prevent additional burden or expense on any other medical professional, health care institution, individual, or patient.

A cause of action for damages or injunctive relief, or both, can be a discriminatory violation of a medical professional's or health care institution's conscience rights. A defense to any discrimination claim that the violation was necessary to prevent additional burden or expense on any other medical professional, health care institution, individual, or patient is prohibited. The aggrieved party must be entitled to recover threefold the actual damages, including pain and suffering, the costs of the action, and reasonable attorney fees. Recovery cannot be less than \$5,000 for each violation in addition to the costs of the action and reasonable attorney fees. It is an affirmative defense for an employer that the specified medical procedure or research was so integral to the duties of the employee's position and to the central purpose of the business or enterprise that a reasonable person would understand that participation in the specified medical procedure or research at issue was a requirement of the employee's position.

The General Assembly can, by concurrent resolution, appoint one or more of its members who sponsored or co-sponsored this legislation in his or her official capacity to intervene as a matter of right in any case in which the constitutionality of the law is challenged.

The bill contains a severability clause for Sections 191.1150 to 191.1168 and if any provision is found to be unconstitutional, the remaining provisions of Sections 191.1150 to 191.1168 will remain in force and effect, with specified exceptions.